

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
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R 261707Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4189
INFO AMCONSUL FLORENCE
AMCONSUL GENOA
AMCONSUL MILAN
AMCONSUL NAPLES

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PINS, IT
SUBJECT: COSSIGA TAKES STRONG MEASURES ON PUBLIC ORDER

REF: ROME 6599

SUMMARY: IN THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING ON APRIL 22
INTERIOR MINISTER COSSIGA OUTLINED STERN MEASURES AGAINST
VIOLENCE, WARNING THAT ATTACKS UPON POLICE BY STUDENT
EXTREMISTS WILL HENCEFORTH BE DEALT WITH AS "AGGRESSION
AGAINST THE STATE". PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS IN ROME ARE
BANNED THROUGH MAY 31. THE GOVERNMENT'S POSTURE HAS BEEN
WELL RECEIVED BY THE PUBLIC GENERALLY AND, AT LEAST INITIALLY,
APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN SUPPORTED AS WELL BY THE LEFT, WHICH
HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY ALARMED BY EXTREME LEFT VIOLENCE.
AFTER A CALM WEEKEND, THE PARTIES OF THE LEFT AND THE
UNIONS BEGAN TO REACT AGAINST THE TOUGH MEASURES, IN PARTICULAR
THE PROHIBITION ON DEMONSTRATIONS IN ROME. END SUMMARY.

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1. IN THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING ON APRIL 22
INTERIOR MINISTER COSSIGA OUTLINED TOUGH NEW POLICIES TO
COMBAT URBAN GUERRILLAS. COSSIGA ANNOUNCED THAT ARMED
ATTACKS ON POLICE WOULD HENCEFORTH BE CONSIDERED "AG-
GRESSION AGAINST THE STATE" AND HE ISSUED A STERN WARNING
THAT HE WOULD "INSTRUCT POLICE TO REACT AS THEY SHOULD
REACT AGAINST ARMED AGGRESSIONS." IN WEEKEND INTERVIEWS

COSSIGA ELABORATED ON HIS NEW POLICIES AND ANNOUNCED THAT HIS PLANS INCLUDE OBTAINING BETTER EQUIPMENT FOR THE POLICE FORCE INCLUDING RUBBER BULLETS, MORE ARMoured VEHICLES, AND BULLET-PROOF VESTS. THE PREFECT OF ROME HAS BANNED ALL PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE CAPITAL THROUGH MAY 31. THIS ACTION CAUSED THE CANCELLATION OF AN APRIL 22 RALLY ORGANIZED BY THE TRADE UNION FEDERATION WHICH THREATENED TO PROVOKE FURTHER DISORDERS.

2. CRITICISM OF COSSIGA'S STATEMENT TO THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS INCREASED IN THE COURSE OF A WEEKEND OF RELATIVE CALM THROUGHOUT ITALY. SPOKESMEN FOR THE PCI, THE PSI, AND THE UNIONS HAVE ALL CONDEMNED, IN PARTICULAR, THE BAN ON DEMONSTRATIONS AS UNDEMOCRATIC AND AUTHORITARIAN, AND ALL ARE CONCERNED THAT TRADITIONAL MAY DAY MANIFESTATIONS IN THE CAPITAL WILL HAVE TO BE CANCELLED. THE CGIL-CISL-UIL CONFEDERATIONS, REPRESENTATIVES OF THE LEFTIST ROME COMMUNAL AND PROVINCIAL GIUNTAS AND LAZIO REGIONAL GIUNTA, AS WELL AS SPOKESMEN FOR THE PSI AND CPI, HAVE ANNOUNCED THEIR INTENTION TO REQUEST A SUSPENSION OF THE BAN FOR MAY 1. THE RADICAL PARTY AND THE FAR LEFT LOTTA CONTINUA ORGANIZATION HAVE BOTH ANNOUNCED PLANS FOR RALLIES IN ROME DURING THE MONTH OF MAY IN SPITE OF THE BAN.

3. COMMENT: IT IS UNCLEAR WHETHER COSSIGA CONSULTED THE ABSTAINING PARTIES BEFORE ANNOUNCING HIS LAW AND ORDER MEASURES. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE DC AND THE ITALIAN PUBLIC GIVE HIGH PRIORITY TO COMBATTING THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CURRENT WAVE OF VIOLENCE AND LAWLESSNESS. THE ATTITUDES OF THE PCI AND PSI ON THESE ISSUES HAVE CHANGED GREATLY IN RECENT MONTHS, BUT IT IS NOT YET KNOWN HOW FAR THOSE PARTIES ARE PREPARED TO GO IN SUPPORTING THE "ESTABLISHMENT" ON SUCH POLITICALLY SENSITIVE QUESTIONS. GARDNER

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